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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH CAPTAIN DAVID PINE, U.S. NAVY (VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ) * MODERATOR: JACK HOLT

THE PENTAGON, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA
10:00 A.M. EDT, THURSDAY, JULY 12, 2007

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CAPT. PINE: Hey, good morning. This is Captain Dave Pine. How are you?

MR. HOLT: Good morning, sir. Welcome to the Bloggers Roundtable. I'm Jack Holt, here with OSD. And we've got some folks on line with us: DJ Elliott, David Axe, Andrew Lubin. We've got a couple more that may be joining us here shortly, but we can go ahead and get started, if you like.

CAPT. PINE: Certainly.

MR. HOLT: Captain David Pine, you're with the Joint Headquarters Training -- the Joint Headquarters --

CAPT. PINE: Joint Headquarters Transition Team.

MR. HOLT: -- Transition Team, yes. Thank you, sir. And do you have an opening statement for us?

CAPT. PINE: I don't have an opening statement, other than the fact I'm really happy to get the opportunity to talk to this blogger group and organization and, more importantly, to answer the questions that you may have. So I -- the time is short, so it would probably be better if we go right to what they're interested in hearing.

MR. HOLT: All right. Very good, sir.

DJ Elliott, why don't you get us started?

Q Yes, sir. I was wondering. I read in the quarterly report that the SIBs, the strategic infrastructure battalions, are supposed to be being converted to regular IA since their two-phase training. I was wondering what they're changing into. That doesn't sound like infantry.

CAPT. PINE: Yeah, the strategic infrastructure battalions, which is -- and they're also battalions and brigades. The acronym SIB, S-I-B, is how they have been referred to. Exactly, they are looking to transition those in two-phase process where we continue the

outfitting of those units that haven't been stood up and re-green the -- those -- and the interim, I guess, word or name we'd like to give them is the Iraqi army infrastructure battalion, recognizing that a normal Iraqi infantry battalion is a light infantry battalion with specific unit field equipment, and currently the strategic infrastructure battalions are equipped with just a(n) individual soldier kit.

And so what we're -- the goal here is to bring them back in, retrain them, kind of a rebluing process for those that have been out there for a long time without much training, ensure they have their OCIE, their individual soldier kit, put them through a training process so that we can kind of recapture and refocus their efforts and to more appropriately align them to what the normal Iraqi army battalions -- the training that they get and how they look.

But it is two-phased, because initially -- the initial retraining, initial -- make sure those units that never were equipped with individual soldier gear -- that they get that, but we can't turn them directly into an Iraqi light infantry battalion until such time as we meet the requirements for that, which is the unit gear that they would retrieve in a battalion unit, a normal Iraqi army unit.

Does that make sense?

Q Yes, sir, it does.

MR. HOLT: Okay. David Axe.

Q Captain, thanks for taking the time. I really appreciate it. I have two questions -- or a two-phased question. The first part is, can you update us on the -- on how the Iraqi officer corps is developing? And then next would be how the NCO corps is developing.

CAPT. PINE: Well, certainly the Iraqi officer corps and the Iraqi NCO corps -- those are great points, because those are big focus efforts for the Iraqi joint headquarters, which obviously is the joint headquarters transition team. That's one of our focus areas. And it's important to recognize two things.

One is it's a generational challenge that we have with the leadership for the Iraqi army. Through the course of the -- you know, I don't know if you say "recent past," but since the time when Saddam was in charge and the wars and battles and engagements have been on where a lot of the top-level folks have been attrited from the force, we have many folks that are now old and retired and former Iraqi army that are no longer in the force. So what we have now are a bunch of new blood and a few old hands that have been around a long time with a lot of experience. But where the Iraqi army is lacking is in those mid-grade officer positions -- captain, major, lieutenant colonel -- and in the middle-grade NCO positions of sergeant, sergeant first class, master sergeant.

And obviously you guys are pretty savvy and recognize that we can -- recruiting is not an issue.

We can recruit officers, get them assessed into the program. And the Iraqis can recruit, enlist the jundi -- no issue. But it takes time to grow mid-grade officers and mid-grade NCOs.

And so it -- that is probably the largest challenge to both of those questions you have, sir, which is, how do you improve what you have and how do you get more? And there are training programs for both the enlisted and the officer. But as you might imagine it is very difficult to throw people of both types back into schooling and training when they're out there on the line every day in the fight.

And so one of the issues that the Iraqis are wrestling with, and we are as well, trying to help them work their way through it, is how do you continue to train? Because -- you know, I'm a United States naval officer, a fighter pilot and a ship driver, and sometimes you say, "Oh, I'm just so busy operating, too hard to train." And of course, in our Western way of thinking, you're never -- you can't say you're too busy to train. You have to train, because you're too busy not to. And that's one of the cultural things, I think, that we have to -- that we're trying to help convince them how important it is that you do dedicate some time for training so you can develop that force in the future.

Q Captain, I'm Gerry Gilmore of American Forces Press Service. You're talking about driving cultural change with the Iraqi military. Are we trying to get the Iraqi officers and NCOs to use initiative? Because I believe in Saddam's military it was all top-down driven. Initiative was discouraged. Is that something you're trying to teach the officers and NCOs in the new Iraqi army?

CAPT. PINE: That's a great question about initiative. I think from a cultural point of view, you are right, it was in the past, and it still is, it's a very top-down ordered kind of organization. They definitely like to have the head boss tell them what it is that they should be doing before they strike out on there.

In the officer corps, at the level that we deal with as the Joint Headquarters Transition Team, which is what's basically the Iraqi Pentagon, the Iraqi Joint Staff, there's a lot of senior leadership up there, and there's -- many of them are Western trained, many of them have a lot of initiative and capability to do things on their own. But there is a -- oh, did we lose you are you still there?

Q No, I'm here.

CAPT. PINE: Okay. I just had some tones go off in the handset.

So it's not that we're trying to change their culture per se, because I don't think we could do that in any kind of stretch of realistic time frame. What the objective is is to help them see what the requirements are for them to be able to meet the complex situation of this counterinsurgency that they're in and to continue to develop and advance the force.

So from an officer perspective, it's probably less -- it's less of

an issue for them because they expect officers to make some decisions at different levels. In the Western forces, especially in the U.S. forces, we give an awful lot of responsibility, authority and accountability to our NCOs, and that is not as prevalent here. In fact, that is -- as you stated in your opening comment there, it's very counter to how they do things.

So I think we have to be able to also from our perspective make sure that we don't have too great of an expectation; you know, that we look at it from the perspective of what is reasonable and can be expected from the Iraqi forces in terms of -- it's not like you can turn a switch overnight and, when a corporal or a sergeant didn't have that kind of responsibility for decades or longer, and now if we think we're going to be able to give them that or encourage them to do that, we can encourage all that we like, but there's only so much movement we can expect.

So I think we -- it requires us to make sure that we manage our own expectations of how far we can get them to adopt a more Western model. And it's a perspective of reality and realism.

So the Officer Corps definitely is used to giving orders and getting those followed at all levels, and that -- generating that very capable NCO force is probably going to be Iraqi good enough; it's not going to look like a Western NCO force in terms of the level of responsibility, authority and accountability that their NCOs manage.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Andrew Lubin.

Q Yes, Captain, good afternoon. Andrew Lubin from ON Point. A couple questions.

CAPT. PINE: Good afternoon.

Q First of all, were CO of the Shreveport when she came up to New York two years ago for Fleet Week?

CAPT. PINE: Yes, I was commanding officer of USS Shreveport (LPD-12), and I was up in Fleet Week. I guess that was a year ago this -- maybe it's two years ago in May.

Q Yeah, two years ago.

CAPT. PINE: I'm losing track.

Q I would imagine.

CAPT. PINE: Time flies pretty fast here, so.

Q No, I saw that my son was part of the Marine contingent up there. They had a -- that was -- there was a quite a show up there for Fleet Week.

CAPT. PINE: Oh, that was a very enjoyable event being up there.

Q That's right. That's -- on more -- but unfortunately -- quickie question here. Do you have -- is there an esprit de corps in the Iraqi army or do they just follow individual generals?

CAPT. PINE: There is amazing esprit de corps from my perspective. I can give you one example. My general officer was on a trip with the M-7, the director of Iraqi training, and they went out to one of the recruit training centers to examine the facilities and talk to the commander of the RTC and to talk to the troops. And the general got up and, as most generals do on a battlefield circulation, talked to the troops that were down -- that were in there going through schooling and through their courses.

And he talked to them, and he was talking to the soldiers and would have a jundi stand up and say -- you know, where are you from and who are you -- and the guy would say, oh, I'm from here or I'm from there. And finally, one of the soldiers stood up and said, "I'm from Iraq. It's not that I'm from Dura or I'm from Al Anbar or I'm from Kurdistan. I'm from Iraq." And the general, you know, just said, "That's exactly the right answer." And you know, it just kind of made the rounds.

There's a tremendous amount in the Iraqi army -- and I say "army," but I mean army, air force and navy and special forces; it's just that 90 percent of the military is army, and it's been a very army-centric kind of focus in the -- in their service. But they are probably the most professional and disciplined of all the organizations, and they are -- they're all about being Iraqi, not being Sunni or Shi'a or Kurd or I'm from here, there or the other. It's about being Iraq and what's best for Iraq.

And you hear that eloquently from the general officers, but what you do hear from the soldiers -- as this one example that my boss came back and told me about and said it was very inspiring to look at how the general motivated the troops and how the troops were responding, how proud they were to be in their new uniforms, in their new gear, going through training, ready to go out there and work on this complex counterinsurgency environment for Iraq, not for their hometown or for their sheikh or for whatever. It was because they are Iraqi, and that actually is very inspiring, I think.

Q Yes, it is.

Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay, thank you very much, sir.

And did anybody else join us online?

Q Jarred Fishman's on, sir.

MR. HOLT: Ah, Jared, all right, have you got a question for the

captain?

Q Great, good afternoon, Captain. Thanks for your time today.

CAPT. PINE: Good afternoon.

Q Just to follow up a little bit on that, can you talk a little bit to the extent that we're having mixed units as far as Kurd, Shi'a, Turkmen all working together with the Sunni? Because obviously we know the problems within the IP and the national guard. But within the army, what are the attempts being made to bring some of the peshmerga into the actual, official army, that kind of a vein as far as where we would see, if a civil war breaks out, is the army going to then break apart or is the army going to stay and fight for the national government?

CAPT. PINE: Yeah, I see and I think, you know, I'm sure it's -- I know it's a good question. Because you know, it's a very diverse country. And I can tell you from the M-1, the director of personnel -- they have very accurate or at least very detailed depictions of the flavors, if you will, of the populations.

And so when they go to recruit, obviously they look very carefully about the individuals in the army. Because what they are trying to make sure they don't do is have an overwhelming majority of one sect or another in there because they're trying very hard in most cases to have it match the population and to be a balanced force. Because they recognize that sectarianism is an influence that's out there in the countrywide.

But I'll tell you that the Iraqi army, the Iraqi armed forces, is much more a secular institution. And they work very hard to try to avoid those influences. At the highest levels, in the joint headquarters, the general officers that I see over there when I'm over there -- it's obvious what they are working on is an Iraqi professional army, not a -- this battalion is Sunni or this organization is Shi'a or this organization is Kurd. It's really about a balanced force; it's really about how important it is that they work together as an organization of Iraqis not specifics.

So one of the things that does matter in their whole recruiting and in their assignments of -- into the different organizations is they do track that. They want to make sure that it's balanced. And one of the things that we do to help that, one of the things that we're helping them with from the joint headquarters transition team, is we send folks out with their mobile recruiting teams, out into the field.

So -- and our folks are there to kind of overwatch and supervise the effort, and we're also -- helped in providing, as required, when it comes to transportation of things to help, you know, be an enabler for them so they can send their mobile recruiting teams out to the areas where, hey, we need to provide recruits to come in to service the battalions and the forces that are in these areas. And they try to program it and target it so that it applies, because one of the

things that has proven to be painful over time on occasion -- you recruit someone from down in the south and you put them up to the north or put them into the west -- because, you know, when the army was first stood up many years ago here -- in the process we're doing this -- is that it was always going to be a guard force, a local force. And we've done some deployability, obviously, with the Fard al-Qanun-Baghdad Security Plan, where battalions have come to Baghdad to help augment the forces here.

And so one of the things they want to make sure they do, though, is that -- they don't want to pick somebody up from his area where he's used to -- and it doesn't mean just a particular sect, but hometown area -- and they like to recruit them from those areas where they can be around the hometown and yet they still deploy them forward into Baghdad or as required, and then obviously they'll return.

So that's kind of a -- I'm sorry if that's a little wandering answer to your question, but it's, you know, much more than that narrow focus.

Q And if I could just follow up quickly. There was something you mentioned about a week ago -- I think they were reporting that a bus full of Sunni recruits to the army was ambushed and most of them were massacred, and that's happened over the years. And what types of efforts are being made to provide more security for the army when they're training and when they're vulnerable as far as transit goes and when they're in training? It seems that somehow al Qaeda pretty much knows where they're going and then hits them when --

CAPT. PINE: Oh, you're asking -- I'm not sure of the specific event you're talking about, where recruits were either going to -- you know, from a recruit location to a training center, and they got -- and they were ambushed or they got caught on the way -- I'm not aware of the specifics. But I know for a fact that when we work to establish, okay -- especially -- one of the things they're doing is not just recruiting, but it's recalls. So we're working very hard on recalling former officers and former NCOs, because leadership, as we've already talked about before, is such a challenge -- because you can't grow them fast -- so that if you can recall them and then they all get screened to make sure that they fit into the system both in terms of medically and age -- and they do a screening on them to make sure they're suitable.

And one of the concerns obviously is if you take them to a recruit center, but now you have to take them to a training center -- obviously the security situation is challenging in much of the country, and so one of the things that our coalition joint headquarters transition team folks do is work with the M1, the Manpower Directorate, and work with the recruiting efforts and the training centers so we can -- we kind of help them do an overwatch, because they work on convoy security, they work on getting their folks in there. But sometimes, when it's not too far to go from a recruit center to a training center -- they're recruited, they come

in, they screen them, they take all the information, they say, here's your class date. It's over at this center, and the recruits have to find their way there. If it's a big change -- a recruiting center and going to a long way, that we have coordinated with buses and coordinated with security as well.

But having said that, that doesn't mean that there aren't times when folks that are moving from one location to another are not susceptible to the terrorism and the violence that's out there. Whether it's focused on, you know, Sunni recruits or Shi'a recruits or Kurd recruits, I'm certain that there's probably a certain amount of that, depending on which organization you're talking about.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you, sir.

And we've got a few minutes left. Do we have any follow-up questions?

Q Yes, sir. This is DJ Elliott again. I was wondering --

CAPT. PINE: Yes, sir?

Q I was wondering about the Iraqi army in terms of its expansion on the logistics side. How far along is that? It seemed real light last I checked.

CAPT. PINE: The Iraqi army -- the expansion of the Iraqi army, obviously one of the things that we are doing as MNSTC-I proper -- the Multinational Security Transition Command -- I know you guys know the acronym, sorry -- the growth, both the basic COIN build of 10 divisions and the prime minister's initiative to get additional forces, to grow the -- both organizationally, with structures and divisions and brigades and battalions, but as well, when you do that you develop the additional motor transport regiments and the other pieces of the divisions to make up that.

Well, obviously, you have a training base that has to be developed to support that as well. Part of that training base are the regional support units, and so that's where your logistical structure is in. In this year, 2007, in MNSTC-I's -- one of our big focus areas is logistics and leaders. And it's the Year of Logistics and Leaders, and so we're working hard to work on the development of leaders and capacity and the logistics. So it is a process by which it's challenging because the organization is, as you guys are all probably aware, logistics is probably the most complex thing any military force does, and so we're trying to really help them focus on the ability to do logistics.

The biggest piece that I see out of it from my perspective is this is a paper-based society. Everything they do is in original, signed, colored ink, copies, for everything they do. And it's slow. And I'm used to 25 years in the United States Navy and I'm used to the kind of electronic medium in the last 10 or 15 years of that where it really speeds things along, and here they don't do that.

So one of the things we're helping them with to help develop that logistical capability is a logistical database. It's modeled on exactly what the United States Air Force uses, as I understand it. And I'm not the expert on it, so I won't talk more about it other than the fact that we're trying to give them the ability to do that. Here's all the stuff they have stockage in the warehouses, here's the demand, here's the work orders, and turn it into electronic medium instead of this, well, here's this raft of papers on three tables and a desk and two chairs of all the stuff, because it's real hard to manage that way. But that is how they have always managed.

And so we're giving them much additional capability, improved capability. We're not there yet. It's a program that's just getting started. So a lot of the overwatch and a lot of the help and assistance that we do as transition teams, as the MNSTC-I staff, which is full of a lot of subordinate organization, is to try to help them develop systems -- logistics policies and processes that are faster responsive to the demands and the needs. And obviously, as we built this force with different gear, different, you know, wheeled vehicles and all the things that go with that COIN force that makes up that table of organization and equipment, we build that all into them so the supply lines, the repair lines, all those things is the focus. And it's a hard nut to crack, but that's where there's an awful lot of energy going on. And so those Regional Support Units that they have, five big ones, we're developing additional ones, helping them develop additional ones, and also down to the garrison support unit, so that we can put logistics -- I guess you could say get those hubs of ability and capability closer to the fielded forces.

MR. HOLT: All right. Anyone else?

Q I just have a follow-up. Do we have time for two questions, Jack?

MR. HOLT: Just got a few minutes. But yeah, sure.

Q I'll be quick.

Captain, Andrew Lubin again, ON Point. Following up on his question, during the surge the reports that the Iraqi logistics weren't up there, that they were running out of bullets, water, and things like that, is their problems just -- are their problems more electronic or more attitudinal where they just don't want to let it go or don't know what to do?

CAPT. PINE: I would tell you that reports of logistic shortages, it's not a function of logistics shortages. The things -- they exist. You know, the ammunition exists, the water exists, the foodstuffs exist. And because we haven't got them into this electronic way of doing it, that's one of the things we're working towards, but we're not there yet. But the issue is the processes by which, okay, a unit in the field says, "I need this, where do I have to go to get it? What's the process?" -- their processes are paper-based and very

cumbersome; require lots of signatures and lots of approvals.

And one of the things that we have been effective in doing is being able to provide these -- to help them come up with ways that get approved by higher authority for shortcuts so it doesn't have to go through the normal chain of a whole lot of signatures, a whole lot of people have to see that piece of paper to get an emergency fuel issue or to get an emergency ammunition issue. Because you get reports about these guys are out of ammo, and you say well there's all kinds of ammunition, what's the issue? Oh, that unit. Okay, well did they request their ammo? Oh, well they didn't request their ammo.

But now -- so frequently -- and I don't get out in the field very much; I'm here pretty much in MNSTC-I base and in with the MOD inside the Joint Headquarters is where I spend my time. But you hear a lot of anecdotal, you know, whining and complaining or stories about they don't have, they don't have, they don't have. And whatever it is, for the most part the gear exists, the gear is available, but sometimes their forces in the field don't know the process by which to get it effectively or efficiently. And one of the things we've done to help them in the CMATT organization, the Coalition Military Assistance Training Team has done is a whole bunch of rehearsal of operational concept drills at the RSUs; brought in all the division loggy types, as well as brigade logistics officers in to help them with this in terms of emergency fuel requirements as well as regular fuel requests, ammunition requirements, emergency ammunition requirements as well as the normal projected ones.

And so what the coalition has been able to do in their overwatch position, in their partnerships with the folks, is help the guys in the field get through the system. And when it's paper-based and cumbersome or they can't find this guy because he's -- they can't get a signature from this one, there are mechanisms that exist to help accelerate that.

And what we're doing is helping them do that. Because I've heard a lot of the anecdotes, but most of them -- there's not, you know, maybe there's a grain of truth or an issue right there. But the supplies exist, but sometimes it's the process by which they -- the units in the field have to go through to get them that's problematic. And they don't -- a lot of folks, I think, maybe don't look far enough in the future to anticipate as well as maybe they could.

Q Great, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, was there anyone else that -- one more question out there? I think we --

Q One more quick question: About how long -- obviously the clock is running out here in Washington. How much longer do you think professionally it would take for them to be able to have a logistics trail that they would be able to actually survive for months after most of our forces are drawn down?

CAPT. PINE: All right, I -- you know, since I don't deal directly

with the logistics world, to come up with -- give you how long would it take to give them a logistics capability that if we were to say, okay, flip the switch; we're not here to help you -- how would that go? I don't think I'm qualified to answer that. I can tell you that I've been here six months, and their capabilities across the board have improved since I've been here, perhaps not at the speed with which we'd like. And the learning curve is relatively steep when you compare it to Western standards.

And that's one of the issues that is the hardest for me, I think, and maybe many of us to do is we're always used to -- we compare it to what we're used to, compare it to the Western model, the U.S. model. And I think we -- I mentioned this before. We need to manage what the expectations are. Because you can make things happen that are good enough that are not acceptable in terms of how we would evaluate our own performance back home in -- so I wish I could give you an answer on, when are they ready to do it if we weren't here at all to provide any oversight or assistance?

The one piece of data I do have is the amount of fuel that they have gotten from the coalition has dramatically reduced just in the six months I have here. The emergency fuel requests where coalition has had to really step in and help -- they've really gone down, because their processes are improving. Now that doesn't mean they're perfect; doesn't mean they can't be improved more. But that's something that's very notable that I've seen. My logistics team lead has shown that to be the case in -- through the forces in the field. So there's progress every day in lots of fields, but I can't give you a specific on that one question.

MR. HOLT: Okay, sir, do you have any closing comments for us?

CAPT. PINE: Well, I think for me from a closing concept, here's a Navy fighter pilot and ship driver who's, you know, engaged in what is, you know, definitely a land-centric event. But it's really, what is our focus here.

And that's the one thing that -- when I got here, I came in, I wasn't exactly sure what my roles and responsibilities are. But it's really -- just tie into what is it that MNSTC-I does as a mission, you know. And our objective is, you know, man, train and equip. It's to assist the Iraqi government in their -- and directly, as -- me from the Joint Headquarters Transition Team, the joint headquarters of the Iraqis -- to develop their capability and that capacity to do those basic kind of Title X functions, which are real near and dear to us, but as well to give them that capability out there, so they can help influence that security situation, provide that stable environment, to give the government of Iraq the opportunity to do that building and rebuilding that is required to give the Iraqi people what it is that they deserve as a democratic institution here, which is that safety and security and the ability to prosper.

So I think we have a fantastic mission, and I think we've got an awful lot of people that are working their tails off to do that. And I think we are being successful.

And final close (sic) would be -- is, you know, we've -- I read the news or see it on the flash or whatever else, and you know, we've just now barely started finally with the surge moving things, and things take time. It's a complex -- in scenario here. In fact, I think this is probably the most complex environment that we've operated in as a military. And nothing happens fast in a counterinsurgency, and nothing happens fast in nation-building. And so sometimes I think we all need to manage our own expectations

MR. HOLT: Very good. Thank you very much, sir. Captain David Pine, United States Navy, chief of staff, the Joint Headquarters Transition Team -- the Multinational Security Transition Team -- Security Transition -- (chuckles) -- I'll get it out yet --

CAPT. PINE: (Chuckles.)

MR. HOLT: -- Multinational Security Transition Team in --

CAPT. PINE: Command Iraq.

MR. HOLT: -- Command Iraq. That's it. There we go.

Thank you, sir, and appreciate you being with us today. And we'll look forward to speaking with you again.

CAPT. PINE: All right. It's my pleasure. Thank you very much, guys.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir.

Q Captain, thanks very much.

Q Thanks.

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